

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE DONNA ISABEL

BY RANDALL PARRISH
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
DEARBORN MELVILL

CHAPTER VII.

In Which I Suspect Evil.

Early dawn reached us in sudden gray, the sun a shapeless blob of dull red, with no vestige of its golden light forcing passage through those dense clouds of misty vapor closing us in as between curtained walls. The swell of the sea was not heavy, but the pervading gloom gave to the surrounding water a peculiarly sullen appearance, through which we tore, reckless of accident, at full speed. A new hand was at the wheel, Johnson having gone below an hour since, but I still clung to the bridge, my eyes heavy from peering forth into the fog-bank, my clothing sodden with the constant drip.

Only a few of the men were visible three or four paces about the captain on the fore-cabin deck, and as many more gathered along the lee side of the cabin. Evidently regular watches were already chosen, and a portion of the crew had been turned in for their trick below. Tuttle himself, clad in wet, slithering oil-skins and looking gaunt and cadaverous, his chin and forehead straight out over the high collar, was standing aft, beside the fellow who still kept guard over the companion. I moved across to the starboard end of the bridge, and when he glanced around, made signal for him to join me.

"Not very much chance of any one overhauling us in this fog, Mr. Tuttle," I said, pleasantly. "It would be like hunting a needle in a haystack."

"Tis as the Lord wills," he returned, rather sourly. "Man proposes, but God disposes. The sun will lift that whole outfit in another hour. How far do you figure we're off shore?"

"Figure it for yourself. We're doing all of 16 knots, and have been for four hours at that speed. With another to be added, even our smoke ought to be below the horizon. We've given them the slip all right, and from now on it's merely a question of steaming to keep ahead. I don't recall anything in the Chilean navy that can overhaul us. What discoveries have you made below?"

He turned his crafty, glittering eyes toward me, twisting the lump of tobacco under his tongue. In some way, beneath the revealing daylight, I became even more distrustful of the man, more conscious of his hypocrisy.

"Not a great deal," his mouth attempting a grin, "except that we've got the crew caged. Everybody was ashore but the harbor watch."

"Then you found the fore-cabin empty?"

"Nothin' there but dunnage and bilge water, regular sea-parlor, sir."

"And no officer on board?" I asked, scarcely believing it possible.

"No," he answered, the engineer, so far as I know. The cabin was locked up by your orders, so I let that alone."

"And that, then, is all you have discovered, is it, Mr. Tuttle?"

He shifted his long legs, but made no effort to turn and face me.

"Well, I guess that's about the whole of it," he answered, slowly, as though deliberating over the choice of words. "Only I'm a bit puzzled

about some things what don't look just right. We started out, as I understand it, to run off with a Chilean warship named the Esmeralda, a schooner-converted steam yacht. That was the contract, wasn't it, sir?"

I nodded, gravely, wondering what the man could possibly be driving at. "That was my understanding," his nasal tone becoming more pronounced and disagreeable. "And somehow what we've got here looks just a bit odd. This here is a schooner-converted steam yacht all right, and I guess the tonnage isn't very far out of the Esmeralda class, but we haven't found a blame Chilean on board—two Swedes, a Dutchman, two Russians, and a bloomin' English engineer."

"Well, what of that?" I broke in impatiently. "You know as well as I do that the entire Chilean navy is filled with foreigners."

"Sure," he coincided, with a swift, questioning glance toward me; "that's all true enough, sir, but I never saw a whole crew of those beggars and no Chilean bossin' 'em. But then that's only a part of it. Every one of those small boats down there, an' the life-preservers hangin' in front of the cabin, have not the name Esmeralda painted on them. Dam' if it ain't, here, too, on this tarpaulin."

I bent over the rail looking down at the lettering he pointed out, yet with no feeling of uneasiness.

"Beyond doubt, that was the yacht's name before the Chilean government purchased her and renamed her Esmeralda for their service. She was bought from English parties, I've heard. Probably the new owners have found no opportunity to repaint the name."

Tuttle drew forth a red bandanna and blew his nose, his voice more sullenly insolent as he resumed speech. "Glad ye take it so cool, an' maybe yer right. However, it looks dam' odd to me."

I glanced aside at the wheelman apprehensively. The fellow was gazing straight ahead of him into the rapidly thinning fog. It was the manner of the mate more than his words that impressed me.

"See here, Mr. Tuttle," and I dropped my hand rather heavily on his sleeve, "kindly explain exactly what you are driving at. Do you intend to insinuate that we have made a mistake in the dark, and run off with the wrong vessel? Why, man, that is impossible. We are sailors, not landlubbers. Both of us have had chances to see the Esmeralda, and you certainly knew where she was moored yesterday."

"Well, when I come to think it over, I don't feel quite so overlastingly sure about that. The mind of man is mighty deceitful," he admitted, slowly. "You see, I never saw her any closer than maybe a mile, an' even then she was half hid behind other ships. Of course I took notice of her outline an' rig, but I didn't pay much attention to details. To-night we was all of us excited, an' colors don't show up much in the dark! Now, her funnel is painted red, an' unless I'm a liar the Esmeralda's was black with a yellow stripe round the top. You

see, Mr. Stephens, we kept in pretty close under cover all yesterday, an' maybe they hauled the Esmeralda up to the government docks, and run another boat into her anchorage."

I laughed aloud, not in the least impressed with his argument. "A very likely story that there were two vessels in that harbor so near each other as to deceive all of us."

He remained stubbornly silent, evidently unconvinced, plucking at his chin and ear.

There is a certain way of settling this matter," I went on, decisively. "It is, by an examination of the papers in the cabin. Take charge of the log, and I'll run down and clear up this affair beyond any further controversy. We may even have one of the ship's officers, aoked away there, checking off his list of passengers. If there is, he's in for a rude awakening. Keep the yacht's log, as she is, and I'll be back directly."

I was aware that he watched me closely as I descended the steps, but felt little interest in such surveillance. That we could have been guilty of so serious an error as he suggested was beyond possibility. Nevertheless the more suspicion was irritating, leaving me filled with a vague unrest. It was quite true that I might have been deceived. I realized that, because I had delayed no opportunity to observe the Esmeralda in daylight, and on occasion to study her lines with care at any time. To me she had appeared merely as an extremely graceful vessel, interesting to the eye of a seaman. But Tuttle and his crew must have known the truth. If we were, indeed, on board the wrong vessel, it was from no innocent mistake of the darkness, but rather the result of deliberate plan, the full purpose of which was beyond my comprehension. I swore silently under my breath, even as I looked at the Esmeralda in the fog.

My mind, as I well recalled, by my increasing dislike of the whole man. The wrong ship! Why the very conception of such an accident was grotesque, ridiculous, beyond belief! It was the hallucination of a fool. One of the men assisted me to the slide across the companionway, and bidding him stand by, I went for a hall, I started below, my fingers on the brass rail, my feet firm on the rubber-lined stairs.

These led into as handsome a sea-cabin as ever I remember gazing upon. Everything was effective and elaborate, evidence of an expenditure that made me stare about in amazement. So deeply did it impress me that I remained there grasping the rail, gazing about in surprise, hesitating to press my investigations further. Yet this feeling was but momentary, the very desertion and silence quickly convincing me that the cabin contained no occupants. The arrangement of the vessel, the tramping of men on the deck, and the ceaseless noise of the screw were more noticeable here than forward, and no seaman, however overloaded with liquor, could have slept undisturbed through the hubbub and changes of the past few hours.

Inspired to activity by this knowledge, and eager to settle the identity of our prize, I began closer examination of that impressive interior, although not entirely relieved from the spell of its royal magnificence. Six doors, three upon each side, opened from the main cabin. The full-length mirrors occupied the spaces between, and the doors themselves were marvels of decoration and carving.

Further, beneath the stairs, led directly into the steward's pantry, and, besides, a passageway leading forward, probably to the lazarette lockers. The others, as I tried their knobs, exhibited merely comfortable staterooms, fitted up for office use; three contained two bunks each, the others only one. Four of the bunks had been carefully made, but the staterooms were in disorder, as though lately occupied. Everything impressed me as unusually clean and inviting, evincing strict discipline. The desk I noticed was a roll-top affair, securely locked, and with no letters or papers lying anywhere about. I figured, was probably the berth of the first officer; the captain's room must naturally be the one farthest forward.

The upright piano, with the high-backed cushioned chairs surrounding it, blocked my view, but on rounding these I observed a closed door, which apparently led into a room extending the entire width of the cabin. Never suspecting that it might be occupied, I grasped the brass knob, and stepped within. Instantly I came to a full stop, dazed by astonishment, my teeth clenched in quick effort at

self-control. The entire scene burst upon my consciousness with that first surprised survey—the draped pedestals, the brass bed screwed to the deck, the chairs upholstered in green plush, the polished table with a vase of flowers, the glass-fronted bookcase in the corner, the floor rug into which my feet sank. All these things I perceived, scarcely realizing that I did so, for my one true impression concentrated itself upon the living occupants.

There were two present. At a low dressing table, her back toward me, facing a mirror, yet with eyes fastened upon an open book lying in her lap, sat a woman. The poorest head yielded me only an indistinct line of her features, yet the full throat and rounded cheek gave pledge of both youth and beauty. Standing almost directly behind her chair, with short, curly locks, crowned by a smart white cap, her hands busied amid her mistress's tresses, was a maid, petite, rosy-cheeked, fluttering about like a hummingbird. The latter saw me at once, pausing in her work with eyes wide open in surprise, but the preoccupied mistress did not even glance up. She must have heard the sound of the door, however, for she spoke carelessly:

"I thought you were never coming. What caused you to sail so suddenly?"

These unexpected words, uttered so naturally, served partially to arouse me from the dull torpor of surprise. I clenched my hands, wondering if I was really awake, and stared back into the frightened eyes of the maid, who appeared equally incapable of articulation. Suddenly she found voice.

"It is not me, madame," she cried, shrinking back. "Non, non; it is an homme étranger."

"What is that you say, Celeste?" and the other arose swiftly to her feet, the open book dropping to the floor as she turned to face me. Instantly I recognized her, in spite of the long hair trailing unconfined far below her waist—recognized her with a sudden leap upward of my heart into my throat. There was no semblance of fear, only undisguised amazement, in the dark gray eyes that met mine.

"What—what is the meaning of this strange intrusion? Are you a member of the crew?"

Instantly my cap came off, the thought occurring to me of what a soaked figure I must be making in my soaked jacket, with the glistening peak of my cap shadowing my face.

"No, madame," and I bowed before her. "I am not one of your crew. My entrance here was entirely a mistake."

She leaned forward, one white hand grasping the back of her chair, the expression in her eyes changing as she read my face, perplexity merging into faint recollection.

"I—I do not quite comprehend," she confessed at last, changing her speech to a slightly broken Spanish. "You—you are Señor Estevan?"

(Continued Next Week.)

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For sale by all dealers. Price 50 cents. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, New York, sole agents for the United States.

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Girl Killed by Bull!

Carleton, Mich., March 9.—Returning to her home at the Heiss farm near Seaford, Miss Becky Heiss, accompanied by her favorite dog, was charged by a bull as she was crossing a field. Miss Heiss fled for the fence and the dog charged the bull, fastened on him, but was thrown off.

The bull reached the young woman when she had come within a few steps of the fence. He caught her on his horns and hurled her against the fence. Then the dog came up and got so busy that the bull turned his whole attention to the woman's defender. Miss Heiss got over the fence when the dog let go and leaped to safety.

Miss Heiss was able to walk home, but took to her bed, her death occurring the next day from internal injuries.

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several years ago with his family. He was identified with clothing firms in that city. While living in that city he was head of a clothing manufactory in Eddyville and later in Clarksville.

At the time of his death Mr. James was a traveling salesman for Hinkle-Harbour company.

The deceased was born in Eddyville, Ky., 65 years ago. He began his business life as a traveling salesman for the Mackey-Nesbit company of Evansville.

Mr. James is survived by his wife, Mrs. Bobbie Cobb James, and four children. The children are Mrs. Charles Vade, Mrs. Frank Byrnes, Mr. Robert James of Evansville, and Miss Linah James, of Clarksville.

An illness of only two weeks preceded Mr. James' death. It was not thought that he was dangerously ill, although it was known that his heart was affected.—Hopkinsville News E.

Agonies Of Pain

Never give up, and think that all women, yourself included, have to suffer pain.

Thousands of women have written to tell how they have cured their womanly ills, and relieved their pains; and over a million have been benefited, in various other forms of female disease, during the past 50 years, by that popular and successful female remedy

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"I believe I would now have been dead," writes Mrs. Minnie Lamb, of Lebanon Junction, Ky., "if it hadn't been for Cardui. I had suffered with bad cramping spells, pains in my back, sides and arms, and awful bearing-down pains. Now these pains have all gone, as a result of using Cardui."

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These seeds are not a lot of promiscuously gathered ones, but they are from reliable growers, whose name appears upon each packet. The packets contain from 1/2 oz. to 1 oz. of seed, the amount in the largest 5 cent package on the market. Here is the collection:—

- 1 pkt. Prize Head Lettuce, large, tender, crisp, good all summer.
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- 1 " Allhead Early Cabbage, best all year-round.
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- 1 " Imp. Blood Turnip Beet, fine grain sweet and tender.
- 1 " Early Model Muskmelon, a drought register, fine.
- 1 " Cumberland Cucumber, best pickling, rapid grower.
- 1 " King of Mammoth Pumpkins, best pie, rapid grower.
- 1 " Mammoth Virginia Peanuts, large, sweet, heavy yielder.
- 1 " Eckford's Mixed Sweet Peas, fine assortment.
- 1 " Tall Mixed Nasturtiums, bright, attractive.

We have bought a large amount of these seed and will give a collection to each one who will send 25c for a year's subscription to THE FARMER'S HELPER and a 2c stamp to help pay postage.

More is a chance to get a first-class magazine for one year, plenty of seed for the garden and save money. SEND NOW.

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For the benefit of those who cannot use the garden seeds we will give the two packets of flower seeds and one RESURRECTION PLANT sometimes called "The Rose of Jericho," a plant that grows by placing its roots in water—just the thing for Easter—to any one sending a dime for 3 months trial subscription. Four packets flower seeds and two plants with a year's subscription at 25 cents. SAMPLE COPY FREE.